We have just 12 years to save the Earth

The Depaulia: DePaul University

October 22, 2018 Monday

University Wire
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Section: OPINIONS; Pg. 1

Length: 783 words

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Body

A catastrophic future isn't far in our future, it's steady and quickly approaching us. A 700-page report released by the United Nations' climate science body says that we have only 12 years to make a change to our global energy infrastructure or risk dramatic consequences.

Rising sea levels, droughts, larger storms, famine, disease, economic crisis, further refugee crises-all of this stems from the world becoming about 2.7 degrees hotter than it was prior to the Industrial Revolution.

The problem comes with the fact that the planet is so far gone at this point and that action would have to be taken so immediately. The hope that the world will be able to turn things around is slim at best and incredibly improbable at worst.

"In a nutshell, the report says that we can't even afford the warming we thought we could afford, and we need to act now," said Mark Potosnak, a DePaul environmental science and studies professor. "The good news in the report is that we still have time to act. The bad news in the report is that we need to act right now."

But what can the average person do to help the world overcome such a massive issue? People might say that they'll recycle, they'll go green, make a compost pile, remove meat from their diet in some capacity and even put a solar panel on their roof.

Unfortunately, according to Barbara Willard, a DePaul professor of communications with an expertise in climate change communication, the impact of making these personal changes is near nonexistent. "Making these small little gestures, like 'I'll bike more' or 'I will use less electricity' or any sort of change that would involve at just the individual level- we're beyond that making a difference now," Willard said. "Even the Paris Climate Accords weren't going to stop this change from occurring."

Willard believes that we don't need small actions at this point. Instead, we need changes from the top down: a complete shift in global economic models as we've known them for the past 200 years-a substantial move away from the current fossil fuel economy by every major government system.

The normal way to look at the situation may be with a profoundly defeatist feeling, but everyday people can make a difference by becoming more politically active. With the midterm elections quickly approaching, putting people with scientifically minded views on climate change in power is one way that a single person can begin to make a difference.

This upcoming election is being called perhaps the most important in our lifetimes for a number of reasons, and one of those reasons should be trying to put people in charge who believe scientists when they talk about just how bad

things are going to get. Climate change beliefs may not be a hot-button issue many politicians are campaigning about this election cycle, but it will likely become one as the impact of global warming becomes more obvious to us.

But the need may be greater than that. To change the course of the Earth's trajectory, our personal choosing to be environmentally conscious doesn't cut it- people who strive for changes are going to need to try to make everyone around them just as environmentally aware.

"It seems to me that the major changes that have occurred throughout history have occurred because of social movement," Willard said. "People are talking about the need to engage in civil disobedience-not revolutionary, violent tactics, but to really just try and push the boundaries a little bit further in what is the acceptable kinds of activism."

Seeds of a social movement are being laid right here at DePaul. The Climate Reality Project, a movement started by Al Gore, is in the beginning stages of being implemented here at DePaul. The Project serves as a platform for grassroots groups who strive for individual communities to become more energy-conscious. Since being established in 2011, the Project has trained nearly 8,000 people from more than 120 countries to help explain the urgency of the situation, and why striving for change isn't an empty action.

The first meeting of the DePaul branch of the Project will be Nov. 7, with Willard acting as the group's advisor. The first major action will be a strong push for 100 percent renewables here at DePaul. It's a small measure, sure-but it's a small measure being pushed for by hundreds of similar branches worldwide.

The future that this U.N. report lays out is not one cast in stone, but it's the one that's approaching us now. If we're to avoid a head-on collision with a future from which there is no turning back, environmentally minded people need to change the world as we've known it for over 200 years.

But no pressure, it's just the end of the world after all.

Load-Date: October 22, 2018

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